

Congress to consider a Medicare prescription drug benefit. The rule would bring H.R. 1495, the "Access to Prescription Medications in Medicare Act of 1999," to the floor for debate and open amendments. My bill provides a new Medicare benefit for prescription drugs—with a \$200 deductible, \$1700 in new benefits, with a 20 percent co-pay and stop loss protection for beneficiaries who would otherwise spend more than \$3000 out of pocket on prescription drugs. This attempt to get a bill considered in the House is a way to force Republicans to finally address the issue of access to affordable comprehensive prescription drugs for seniors.

A number of my colleagues and I have offered proposals for a way out of the current predicament which is particularly unfair to seniors lacking prescription drug coverage. The President has put forth his own Medicare prescription drug proposal which has no new deductible, requires a 50 percent co-pay of \$2000 in 2002, rising to \$5000 in 2008, and no stop loss protection. The "Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act" (H.R. 664) introduced by Representatives Allen et. al. also has tremendous support. While this legislation would not create a new Medicare drug benefit, it would extend discounts to seniors equivalent to the discounts obtained by other large purchasers.

As a recent Families USA study makes painfully clear, the cost of prescription drugs has become unbearable for America's more than 14 million Medicare beneficiaries who cannot afford prescription drug coverage. The Families USA study finds that seniors, the last major insured consumer group without a prescription drug benefit, are paying prices that are rising four times faster than the rate of inflation. According to this well-researched study, these drug prices support profit margins for the makers of those drugs that averaged 20 percent, while the median margin for Fortune 500 companies is only 4.4 percent. These high prices are supplementing the already-inflated paychecks of those who work for the drug industry.

Likewise, the minority staff of the House Government Reform Committee recently conducted a comparison of prescription drug prices in my district and dozens of other districts and found that seniors buying their drugs out-of-pocket are paying about twice as much as the drug companies' favored customers (such as large insurance companies and HMOs). For Zocor, a cholesterol-lowering medication taken by millions by Americans—myself included—the price differential between what a consumer would pay who has no drug insurance relative to the rate for large group health plans is a staggering 229 percent—\$114.62 versus \$34.80 for a bottle of 60 pills.

At the same time, an article in last Sunday's Washington Post reported that the four area HMOs serving Medicare recipients in Washington, D.C. will limit prescription drug benefits beginning January 1st. This appears to be reflective of a national trend as many managed care companies sharply raise co-payments and cap drug coverage. For example, next year UnitedHealthcare will raise prescription drug co-payments from \$20 to \$90 for a 90-day mail order supply of a brand-name drug and Cigna plans to reduce its annual benefit for brand-name prescription drugs from \$600 to \$400, with a new limit of \$100 per each quarter of the year.

The public overwhelmingly recognizes the need to provide seniors with access to afford-

able drugs. According to a recent Harris poll, 90 percent of Democrats, 87 percent of liberals, and 80 percent of Republicans and conservatives support a Medicare drug benefit. In addition, 70 percent of those participating in a recent Discovery/Newsweek poll ranked the high cost of prescription drugs as "the most important problem with the health-care system." And in a survey undertaken to better understand the American public's concerns, last Sunday's Washington Post reported the fear that "Elderly Americans won't be able to afford the prescription drugs they need" as one of the top issues that worries Americans.

So why, in light of the public's priorities, has there been a real reluctance for Republicans to move forward on the issue of Medicare prescription drug coverage this Congress?

Last week, Republicans decided to bring the BBA Refinement Act to the House floor under suspension so that amendments could not be introduced—such as the one based on Representative ALLEN's drug discount proposal. This legislation would have given seniors a price discount on their prescription drugs and permitted beneficiaries to finally purchase medicines at a fair price—bringing an end to the drug companies' price discrimination. And recently, the Ways and Means Republicans all voted against that same amendment offered by my colleague, Representative KAREN THURMAN, to include a discounting provision in the BBA Refinement legislation.

It is this lack of Republican responsiveness that is leading me to file the rule for a discharge petition to bring H.R. 1495 to the floor. There are a number of good proposals out there. Any and all of them would improve the current, deplorable state we are now in. I think we can all agree that the current situation is not working and that the most important step we can now take is to increase access to affordable prescription drugs for our nation's seniors.

TO RECOGNIZE TEACHERS WHO HAVE WON USA TODAY AWARD

HON. MAC COLLINS

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 9, 1999

Mr. COLLINS. Mr. Speaker, when USA TODAY selected 29 of America's top teachers for its All-USA Teacher Team, I was proud to learn that 3 of them came from the Third District of Georgia. USA TODAY says the team parallels the All-USA Academic Team which has been selecting outstanding students since 1987.

I want to introduce these teachers to Congress. They represent the best in their profession, not only for their dedication, but for their creativity in designing programs to help children. Each has started an important program that teaches children both in the classroom and outside.

It goes without saying that each of these teachers developed their program on their own. These programs were developed in Columbus and Newnan, not in some bureaucrat's office in Washington, D.C.

Tina Cross, of Carver H.S., in Columbus, is a 25-year teaching veteran. She teaches advanced placement biology and physics. Her students are participating in a space shuttle

science project with North Carolina in sending peanuts into space to examine the effect of zero gravity on the nutrients. She said the peanut industry is also working with the students on the shoe-box-sized experiment.

Cross's students have other, more down-to-earth projects as well. They have raised money to build a Habitat for Humanity house in Tanzania, and in Columbus itself.

She teaches at George Washington Carver High School, which has over 1,700 students. It has science, math, technology, and vocational magnet programs. The school is named for the famous African American scientist George Washington Carver, whose work with peanuts helped revive Southern agriculture and improve nutrition. The peanut project is appropriate, don't you think?

Sylvia Dee Shore, a 30-year teaching veteran at Clubview Elementary in Columbus, teaches third graders. She started the Riverkids Network, which involves over 1,000 children from 18 schools in grades 3 through 8. She started the interdisciplinary river awareness project in 1994. The students sample the Chattahoochee River's waters, do chemical testing, and study insects and other animals found in the river system. They publish a bi-monthly newsletter, and an annual Riverkids Cookbook.

Clubview Elementary has 500 children from grades kindergarten through sixth grade. The school has very strong community roots with second and third generations attending school there.

Dr. Carmella Williams Scott, a 23-year teaching veteran teaches at the Fairmount Alternative School, in Newnan. She concentrates on children who have been sent to the school from juvenile justice departments or who have been expelled from other schools.

She teaches middle and high school students English literature and law. She introduced Cease Fire, which operates a juvenile video courtroom. Students assume the roles in the court of the judges and lawyers. They even film the proceedings and hold open hearings so other students can see what happens.

When students have altercations in the school, they are hauled into court to be judged by their peers, says Dr. Scott. This helps them learn to handle conflict without violence, and to resolve differences without fighting. "They coined the phrase, 'Don't hold a grudge—take it to the judge,'" Dr. Scott says. Her innovative program enhances her students to become a part of the judicial system. "They are tired of being this side of the court, and want to be on the other side of the court," she said. "This teaches them to think on their feet, research the law, and gives them practical skills."

Fairmount Alternative school has 150 students and 12 teachers, and specializes in working with students on a more individualized basis than most schools. Most students attend the school for 9-week stints.

The innovative program has landed Dr. Scott many awards, as well as an appearance on Japanese television.

These teachers have given a lot to the children they have worked with over the years. They have given to their communities. I want to thank them publicly for their effort, and to thank USA TODAY for providing them with this public recognition.